



AMERICAN OSTEOPATHIC ASSOCIATION

1090 Vermont Avenue NW, Suite 510, Washington D.C. 20005 ph 202 414 0140 | 800 962 9008

November 16, 2009

U.S. House of Representative  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative:

In the coming days, the United States House of Representatives will begin consideration of the “Medicare Physician Payment Reform Act of 2009” (H.R. 3961). This legislation is of the highest importance to the American Osteopathic Association (AOA), our 67,000 members, and the patients they care for. We urge you to support this important legislation when it is considered by the House of Representatives.

Over the past eight years, physician payment policies, specifically the sustainable growth rate (SGR), have eroded physicians’ confidence in and acceptance of the Medicare program and decreased beneficiaries’ access to health care. Congress has acted annually over this period to prevent deep and devastating cuts in physician payments. While we remain appreciative of these efforts, the means by which those cuts were prevented has created a policy crisis that is on the brink of realization. In 2010, physicians face a 21 percent reduction in their Medicare payments with additional cuts predicted over the next decade.

Furthermore, since payment systems such as TriCARE and private health insurance plans base their payment rates upon this flawed Medicare formula, the current payment methodology has had a profound negative impact upon the health care system as a whole. Continued reliance upon this flawed, unstable, and inequitable payment methodology threatens access to care for millions of patients and creates an environment whereby the overall quality of care is threatened. Meaningful and long-term reform of the physician payment formula will ensure that all patients have access to quality physician services.

The American Osteopathic Association (AOA) believes that the United States House of Representatives must take advantage of this historic opportunity to enact comprehensive reforms to the Medicare physician payment system that will ensure all patients have access to quality, comprehensive, physician-directed health care. It is impossible to achieve meaningful health system reforms independent of establishing long-term stability in physician payment methodologies. Additionally, failure to act now will only exacerbate the cost of repealing this flawed formula.

We strongly support the approach taken in H.R. 3961 whereby the current payment methodology is eliminated permanently. We applaud the decision to establish a new methodology whereby physicians' services are bifurcated into independent service targets. Under this proposal all evaluation and management services, along with designated preventive care services, would be reimbursed using a methodology that promotes their delivery and provides adequate compensation to both primary care and specialty physicians.

Physicians are the foundation of our nation's health care system. We believe that the goals of health care reform legislation cannot be fully realized without a comprehensive overhaul of the Medicare physician payment system. For this reason we are asking you to join us in preserving access to physician services for our nation's Medicare beneficiaries by supporting H.R. 3961. We urge your support and the immediate approval of this legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Larry A. Wickless DO". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Larry A. Wickless, DO  
President